



Testimony by President James Schmutter
Western Connecticut State University
Before the Higher Education and Employment
Advancement Committee
February 10, 2011

For the record, I am James W. Schmutter, President of Western Connecticut State University, and I write in support of proposed House Bill 6050, "An Act Concerning the Development of the Creative Economy."

I provide this testimony from two viewpoints: first, as the president of a university for which the arts are a major focus and which is the home of the Connecticut State University System's only School of Visual and Performing Arts; second, as a former business school dean who has had experience with economic development in three states during my career.

I believe that Connecticut is favorably positioned to make the development of an economy based on the arts and other creative enterprises an important comparative advantage. I cite three reasons for this:

1. Connecticut's location near New York City, one of the world's great creative hubs, cannot be duplicated by other states. We are also close to similar resources and outlook in the Boston and Providence regions. This location would make it possible to create here a "creative corridor" to attract both individuals and enterprises focused on the arts and creativity. Economic development theory stresses the importance of such corridors, and this is a unique strength we have. No matter how hard you tried, you could not accomplish this in Kansas or in Michigan, where in fact I participated in an unsuccessful effort to do so.
2. Connecticut already has a significant population of individuals whom the economic development guru Richard Florida would term members of the "creative class." His argument is that such highly educated, high income folks attract others like them and so build a creative economy. I know we have clusters of such people—artists, designers, writers, media developers—in New Haven, in Litchfield and Fairfield Counties, and in Hartford. No doubt they reside elsewhere in the state as well. Again, this is a comparative advantage that is difficult to build from scratch.

3. Connecticut enjoys the presence of institutions of higher education that are already both notable for their fine arts programs and that provide hubs for the encouragement of creative activity in their locales.

This is certainly the case for us at Western Connecticut State University. Our School of Visual and Performing Arts produces graduates who add to the creative talent pool of the state. More than half of the public school music teachers in the state are Western grads; many of our graphic design grads work for major Connecticut corporations; and our theatre alumni not only labor on Broadway and in LA, but also in Connecticut venues such as the Long Wharf Theatre.

In addition, the many public programs in arts that take place on our campus—plays, concerts, gallery exhibitions, our annual computer animation festival—make Danbury a more attractive, vibrant environment. Our local economic development team employs these resources in seeking to attract business, and they tell me it makes a difference. This creative activity also makes the region a hotbed of all sorts of arts endeavors, from coffeehouse readings to experimental music to summer theatre. And because of our comparative advantage in the arts, we have been able to forge productive partnerships with other arts organizations such as the Charles Ives Center and the Connecticut Film Festival.

Danbury and Western's experience demonstrate how Richard Florida's "creative class" can be nurtured in Connecticut. We have an opportunity to develop such an environment statewide, and I encourage the process that this bill outlines to begin that work.

Thank you.